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Q&A with Cal State Long Beach's new president

What Loren J. Blanchard has to say about AI, tuition and what's next for students

By Kate Raphael

In early May, Loren J. Blanchard assumed the presidency at Cal State Long Beach. He's coming off a successful tenure as president of the University of Houston-Downtown and six years working as executive vice chancellor for academic and student affairs. Barely a week into his new role, the Long Beach Business Journal sat down to discuss his priorities and approach — from tuition to artificial intelligence to student success.

Responses have been edited for length and clarity.

Long Beach Business Journal: Some people may not know that much about your background. What should people know about you?

Loren Blanchard: I am elated to be



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

Loren J. Blanchard, President of Cal State University Long Beach

here at California State University, Long Beach. It has everything to do with the consequential impact that this university makes on students

Blanchard page 4

City plans supersized July 4 fireworks show

The extravagant display will have barges up and down the coast.

By Jacob Sisneros

The city of Long Beach wants to light up its coastline for America's 250th birthday.

City officials asked the California Coastal Commission for permission to quadruple the size of its normal July 4 fireworks show by anchoring three barges 1,200 feet off the shore in three locations stretching from Junipero Beach to Belmont Shore. They would be in addition to the barge already approved to launch fireworks

Fireworks page 11



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

Mayor Rex Richardson hugs County Supervisor Janice Hahn at his election night party in Long Beach on Tuesday, June 2, 2026.

Mayor Richardson on track to win second term without facing runoff in November

With most ballots counted, Richardson was claiming well over 50% of the vote.

By John Donegan

Long Beach Mayor Rex Richardson stormed ahead in early returns on election night, June 2, overshadowing six little-known rivals and potentially securing him four more years in office in a race that strengthens his standing for a potential run for higher office.

With most ballots counted but

more still being tallied, Richardson was holding just over 57% of the vote as of June 10.

Joshua Rodriguez, a law enforcement officer, was in second with 18%, followed by local business owner Chris Sweeney at 10%.

Standing beside family and several City Council members at a rooftop election night party, Richardson thanked his supporters, saying the results reflect a voter base that supports his vision for the city and the direction it is headed.

"For me, this means we're going to continue building jobs, jobs that are

Richardson page 10

Congressman wants to take on Trump if Democrats win midterms

Rep. Robert Garcia would likely get huge new power to antagonize the president if the House flips this election.

By John Donegan

Robert Garcia entered the national scene in 2023 with little experience outside Long Beach city politics. Now a rising star and catapulting up leadership ranks in the Democratic Party, the junior representative's political future —

and the pace of his ascent — may be more closely tied to the race to control Congress itself than his own re-election.

The congressman has repeatedly fashioned himself a ubiquitous thorn in President Trump's side. Since joining the House Oversight Committee in 2023 and rising to minority chair last June, Garcia forced a sprawling investigation into the Justice Department's handling of the Epstein Files, called for cabinet resignations and launched probes into federal immigration operations in Minneapolis and Los Angeles. Most recently, he

Garcia page 5

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ON THE COVER



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

Loren J. Blanchard, President of Cal State University Long Beach

Blanchard *from page 1*

and the larger community. Many other universities have learned a great deal about how to effectively implement student success strategies through their observations and time at CSULB.

I am a first-generation student, and we've got a sizable number of students here that are also first-generation. I can see myself in the same shoes as students here — understanding the importance of support to ensure that students get their college degrees and understanding the kind of knowledge and skills that will prepare students to be leaders in their professions and communities.

What are you hearing from students, faculty and staff about what they want CSULB to focus on? Set out your agenda.

Let's be clear, this is day seven. I have a lot more listening and learning to do.

That said, students are excited about understanding how we are going to move this university even further. I had a good conversation with students studying to become teachers about how the university is preparing them to effectively teach the next generation of students — and how they can start applying that knowledge as early as possible.

Faculty and staff are looking at how they can be of the best support to students by understanding barriers that students have in place, and how faculty and staff can help address those. We have quite a few academic support systems in place, and we're really looking at the mental health side as well. We think about basic needs — looking at food insecurities and housing insecurities, childcare, transportation — all of the things that really can stand in the way of a student getting a degree.

What do you see as the major challenges higher ed is facing right now, and how do you plan to address them at CSULB?

One is artificial intelligence. We certainly have to focus on academic integrity and ensuring that there won't be misuse or unethical use of AI, especially in the learning environment. But by the same token, we are looking at: How do we prepare students with the competencies that they need, especially for the workforce? It's not universal, meaning that if you're going to be a psychologist, how you might use AI

is different than if you're going to be an engineer. The California State University system is allowing students to specialize in areas around AI that make them ready for the workforce.

One of the ways that I've actually seen college students use AI is to augment their own learning. Students don't always grasp concepts in the same way and at the same pace. I have seen students use AI after class to get stronger explanations of a mathematical concept, for example. They are not only applying this information to their own learning, but they're getting better grades as a result of it.

Also, when they're going out to do the experiential learning (an internship, for example), they're seeing how companies use AI, and then they come back here and they're able to explain exactly how AI is being used in their profession, and they're working with faculty to better understand how the curriculum can be shaped to include these AI concepts.

There's a lot of angst around unethical use and academic dishonesty using AI — that's one side of the coin, but the other side of the coin is really watching how masterfully students are using AI. It's a building and flying the plane process that's happening not only at this campus, but throughout the CSU.

How are you thinking about supporting students who are either undocumented or have undocumented family members?

We continue to provide the support for them, not only in terms of academics, basic needs, etc., but also on the legal front. If we find that they're having challenges psychoemotionally because they're seeing other families being deported, then we point them in the direction of mental health services that we have. In the case of their family members, we can point them in the direction of resources with our external partners.

A lot of our students really take advantage of our food pantries — many students and their families are afraid to go grocery shopping. And having food access has been very helpful to a number of students and their family members.

Nearly two decades ago, Cal State Long Beach agreed to guarantee CSULB admission to students who graduated from Long Beach Unified and met the standards for CSU admission — called the "Long Beach College Promise." Since then, CSULB has raised the standard for acceptance as its pool of applicants has grown. How are you thinking about upholding this promise to LBUSD students?

Recently, the university raised its admission standards, and as a result, a number of Long Beach high school students who had strong GPAs and had passed all their A-Gs were not being admitted.

I'm really excited that CSULB began a new program called Promise To The Beach, a pilot program to admit Long Beach Unified students who did not meet the higher standards. In looking at the first cohort, many students have performed very well.

We have a strong commitment to continuing the College Promise Program. I'm exploring ways that we can even deepen it further. A large number of our graduates who have been a part of the College Promise program are now working at the Port — a great sign of how higher education can partner with K-12 as well as the community colleges and local industry to make a difference.

Many people are grappling with the value of higher ed. And while the CSU system is a high-value education, students are also facing tuition increases. How will you balance keeping education affordable while also covering the university's costs and reducing the structural deficit?

The California State University system itself has done an incredible job over the years in trying to keep the tuition rate as affordable as possible. And by the same token, I'll say that in order to offer quality programs, attract the very best faculty and staff and provide the best support services, it does require resources.

We've been very fortunate over the years in terms of state appropriations, and we're also very fortunate because we are a highly-enrolled university.

We do have students that have financial challenges, and we work very diligently with them to help them fill that gap. But with the understanding that social mobility is our ultimate goal, so that they won't feel that financial pressure by the time that they leave here.

How are you thinking about federal pressure on higher education around curriculum, diversity, equity and inclusion and research priorities?

With the loss of federal funds and with the DEI changes, there's still a focus on outcomes. A number of strategies and practices that were associated with discontinued programs have significantly increased graduation rates.

More importantly, we're getting students to timely degree completion — students across the board, not just minority students. A lot of universities have implemented and scaled these strategies because they have been so successful for all students. Many universities that have lost these funds are finding internal resources to help to continue those programs because they don't want to see a decrease in their graduation rates, and more importantly, they don't want to see any problems with students not reaching the finishing line and moving into greater social mobility and leadership roles that they absolutely deserve.

What's something people should know about you that isn't immediately apparent from your resume?

I love playing Scrabble. I love musical performance. I come from a family with a musical background, and I'm really drawn to any form of performance, theatrical or musical.

I value the importance of community and how a university can partner with the city and region to impact the quality of life of people who live there. On top of that, individual people come to a university in search of community — and the university serves as a powerful place to make that happen. ■

Garcia *from page 1*

sought to block Trump's new \$230 million ballroom.

But his efforts, despite his pomp and soapbox flair, up to this point have run into a hard ceiling. As the minority chair of the chamber's main investigative committee, he and his colleagues can pursue inquiries and lob questions at witnesses, but they cannot issue subpoenas or call hearings without Republican support.

This year, Democrats have the chance to flip that dynamic, empowering their colleagues on the committee by taking the House.

Garcia performed well in the June election. Even with four challengers in a newly redrawn district that includes conservative Huntington Beach, he won over 50% of the vote. Democrats think they too will be broadly successful, but a shrinking number of obtainable seats caused by rampant gerrymandering efforts nationwide may ultimately determine control of the U.S. House and scramble the math.

Currently, Republicans hold a narrow majority in the House, with several vacancies due to resignations and deaths. For Democrats to seize power, they must defend their battleground seats and flip at least eight Republican-held districts out of roughly 18 tightly contested races nationwide, according to the Cook Political Report.

Tight competitions are especially fraught in Colorado, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Arizona.

Eric McGhee, an analyst with the Public Policy Institute of California, said history is already on Democrats' side.

Typically, the party out of power gains congressional seats. And this year, he said, their odds are buttressed by President Trump's declining approval ratings, high gas prices and a stalled war in Iran. Noting that general frustrations may dissuade regular Republicans from voting, McGhee believes Democrats have the odds in their favor to reclaim the House.

"I'll just put it this way, I would be surprised if they didn't," McGhee said, citing recent polls.

However, the climb may not be simple. A nationwide redistricting battle, in which Republicans and Democrats across the country have resorted to gerrymandering to draw safer districts ahead of midterms, has cut down the number of competitive races, mostly in favor of the G.O.P.

Through redrawn maps in Texas, Florida, Missouri, North Carolina, Tennessee and Ohio, Republicans have shifted 14 seats to tilt in their favor, attempting to lessen the traditional midterm advantages of the party out of power.

Voting districts are typically redrawn only once a decade, after each census.

Experts also point to a U.S. Supreme Court decision that eliminated racial gerrymandering in majority-minority districts and could lead to leadership



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal
Long Beach Rep. Robert Garcia, flanked by Epstein survivor Annie Farmer (left) and Long Beach Councilmember Megan Kerr (right), demands the release of the Epstein Files during a press conference in Long Beach on Monday, Sept. 29, 2025.



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal
Congressman Robert Garcia and Kamala Harris, former vice president, celebrate after she swore him in as the top Democrat on the Oversight Committee in Long Beach, Wednesday, Aug. 20, 2025.

changes in up to 14 districts, potentially disenfranchising minority populations in Louisiana, Arizona, New Mexico, Tennessee and Alabama.

Matt Lesenyie, a political science professor at Cal State Long Beach, called this ruling the "biggest threat" to Democrats winning the House, noting it could undo any gains supplied by California Proposition 50, the state's own gerrymandering effort to gain five seats.

Because the margins are so tight, Lesenyie said Democrats need a perfect storm in the upcoming special elections this summer and early fall.

McGhee, though more optimistic, acknowledged that national redistricting efforts mean Democrats may need to win an extra 10 seats, though polling suggests they can overcome that deficit.

If Democrats pull it off, the Oversight Committee will be a powerful

tool for them to obstruct and attack Trump in the final two years of his presidency.

What would that mean for Garcia? Although he is currently the minority chair, party leadership could still bestow the majority seat on a more senior member. He previously won his current leadership post in a 150-63 vote amid calls for generational change, defeating 70-year-old Rep. Stephen Lynch, D-Mass.

Chase Meyer, a political science professor at the University of South Carolina, said tradition would have Garcia retain the chairmanship. "However, it is not 100% guaranteed to happen," he wrote.

Typically, the party would hold another caucus-wide vote. "While all members of the party vote, the party leadership can absolutely place their thumbs on the scale," Meyer said.

Garcia must stay in good graces

with party leadership, he added, which can mean voting lockstep on important legislation and procedural votes but also donating and fundraising for Democrats' benefit.

According to recent campaign filings, Garcia's campaign has more than \$1 million in cash on hand.

"In a safe seat where he is highly unlikely to face any real competition in November, he does not need that money for his own race," Meyer said. "Thus, party leadership is going to expect Garcia to donate a good bit of that money to the party to help the party win more competitive seats."

Lesenyie gave it equal odds that internal party drama or seniority claims could get in Garcia's way. "It'd be dumb, but not impossible," Lesenyie said.

Ultimately, Lesenyie noted that Garcia's success will depend on his own ability and influence, adding that while many "flash in the pan" politicians dull quickly, Garcia, 47, has consistently met and exceeded expectations. "Are they at that point where it's like, yeah, 'This guy should be a centerpiece, a crown jewel and strategy of what the next generation can do?'" Lesenyie said.

Garcia said that if given the seat, he would launch investigations into alleged corruption within the Trump administration, including contract handling within the Department of Homeland Security and vaccine programs within the federal Health Department, as well as congressional stock trading and lobbying limits.

"These are things that are practical, that make sense," he said. ■

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EXPERTS JOIN THE CONVERSATION

This column is underwritten by the
Ukleja Center for Ethical Leadership
at Cal State Long Beach

Servant leadership: civic stewardship beyond the ballot box

By Mark Guillen

There is a version of civic life that most of us were taught to admire — the informed voter who studies the candidates, marks the ballot with care and goes home satisfied. It is a worthy image, but incomplete. The real work of building a city does not happen in the voting booth once every two or four years. It happens in rooms most people never enter — the neighborhood council meeting on a Tuesday night, the nonprofit board wrestling over a difficult budget, the city commission weighing a land-use decision that will shape a community for a generation. Citizenship, at its fullest, is not a transaction. It is an ongoing practice — and it carries genuine ethical weight.

This is the third article in a series exploring what ethical leadership looks like in the life of a community. The first two pieces examined how the principles that drive integrity in business — transparency, accountability and the courage to name hard tradeoffs — translate into the way leaders serve. This piece turns to the other side of that relationship — the responsibilities that belong to citizens themselves and why disengagement is not a neutral act.

The Ethical Obligation of the Informed Voter

Long Beach voters face a consequential year. The city is holding elections for mayor, city attorney, city auditor, city prosecutor and city council with a primary this June and a general election on November 3, 2026. These are not abstract offices. They make decisions about public safety, infrastructure, housing and the long-term fiscal health of a city of nearly half a million people.

The same principles of ethical leadership we apply to business conduct apply here. An ethical leader does not make consequential decisions without doing the homework. Neither should an ethical voter. Seeking out candidate records, reading past votes, scrutinizing campaign finance disclosures and honestly weighing competing priorities — this is not optional subconscious citizenship. It is a moral responsibility.

Disengagement has a cost, even when it feels like a passive choice. Democracy functions best when a broad cross-section of the community brings its voice, its experience and its values to the process. When citizens disengage, the conversation narrows — and the decisions that follow reflect a smaller slice of the community than they should.

Of course, the relationship runs both ways. Candidates who are transparent about their priorities, honest about the tradeoffs their positions require and willing to distinguish what they know from what they believe make it easier for voters to do their part. An informed electorate and principled leadership are not competing forces; they reinforce each other. The higher the standard cit-

izens hold themselves to, the more that standard shapes the leaders who seek their trust.

Service Beyond the Ballot

Voting is foundational, but the character of a city is ultimately shaped in the spaces between elections. Long Beach is held together by hundreds of individuals who serve without title, compensation, or much public recognition — on planning commissions, library boards, business improvement districts, school advisory committees, parks and recreation councils, and the neighborhood associations that give residents a direct voice in decisions that affect them daily.

Showing up in these rooms with integrity means something specific. It means laying your cards on the table and disclosing conflicts of interest before they become problems, not after. It means naming the tradeoffs honestly rather than pretending every decision is cost-free. It means listening to the people most affected by a decision, not just the people with the loudest voices in the room. And it means putting the community's long-term interests ahead of short-term convenience, including your own.

This kind of civic stewardship is not glamorous, and it is not easy. It requires a set of skills and, more importantly, a set of values — a genuine orientation toward service over self. These values are not always naturally occurring. They are taught, practiced and reinforced over time.

An Investment in Civic Character

This is precisely where institutions like the Ukleja Center for Ethical Leadership at California State University, Long Beach (CSULB) play a role that goes beyond the classroom.

Established in 2005 to offer training to enhance the integration of ethics in everything we do, the Ukleja Center engages students, faculty and community leaders through programs and activities that embody its core values. Designed as a university-wide interdisciplinary center of excellence and housed in the College of Business, it actively engages students, faculty and community leaders through programs built upon integrity, servant leadership, excellence and empowerment.

The center's flagship Student Leadership Institute takes that mission off-campus and into the community. The two-semester course is hosted by local institutions including F&M Bank, Long Beach Medical Center and the Port of Long Beach, giving students an opportunity to explore ethical issues related to business, education, government, healthcare and other professional fields. Teamwork, community service and networking with guest speakers are integral to the two-semester class experience.

The center's core values are woven throughout its educational programs and its Ethics Across the

Curriculum initiative carries those values across the entire university. To date, the Ukleja Center has awarded over \$650,000 in stipends to faculty across disciplines for integrating ethics modules into their courses. The goal is ambitious and right; ethics not as a standalone elective, but as a lens woven into every field of study with an ethics module in every CSULB course.

The annual Nell and John Wooden Ethics in Leadership Award reminds the broader community that ethical leadership is not theoretical. It is embodied by real people doing real work. The 2024 award honored Erin Garrity Rank, President and CEO of Habitat for Humanity of Greater Los Angeles, recognized as an embodiment of servant leadership. The award is not simply a celebration; it is a public articulation of the standard the community aspires to hold.

In a city the size and complexity of Long Beach, the most consequential decisions are often made not by the most visible leaders, but by the people who show up consistently to the rooms where few others bother to go. City commissions. Nonprofit boards. Neighborhood councils. These are the seats where Long Beach's character is actually decided, where the values of a community are either honored or quietly strengthened.

The Ukleja Center exists, in significant part, to fill those seats with people who are prepared to occupy them well — graduates and community members who understand that leadership is not primarily about power, but about responsibility. Leaders who know that transparency is not a vulnerability but a source of trust. Leaders who have been taught, explicitly and repeatedly, that service to others is not a sacrifice of self-interest but the highest expression of leadership.

As Long Beach heads to the polls in 2026 and beyond, the city would do well to remember that democracy is only as healthy as the civic culture that sustains it. That culture is built one informed voter, one honest candidate and one dedicated volunteer at a time. It is built in classrooms and conference rooms and community meetings by people who have decided that showing up — with integrity, preparation and a genuine commitment to something larger than themselves — is not optional. It is what citizenship requires.

Mark Guillen is the External Affairs Director for Zayo Group. He is Immediate Past Chair and a current advisory board member for the Ukleja Center for Ethical Leadership at California State University, Long Beach.



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REAL ESTATE

Construction begins on long-awaited \$105 million beachside pool

The Belmont Pool complex is slated to be finished before the Olympics.

By John Donegan

It took more than a decade of planning, revisions and false starts, but construction is underway on a new, \$105 million shoreline pool that will serve as one of the city's marquee infrastructure projects ahead of the 2028 Olympics.

A groundbreaking ceremony took place May 30, but crews have been working at the site since April, starting with the demolition of the adjacent kiddie pool to make space for building materials. They expect to finish construction by spring 2028, months before the games commence. While the pool itself will not be used for a specific event, several water-based competitions like open-water swimming, sailing and rowing will be hosted nearby.

Once complete, the publicly funded center will include a 50-meter Olympic pool with spectator bleachers, a mobile bulkhead and four springboards. There will also be a shallow therapy and learning pool, spray zones and a multiuse building with lockers, offices and changing rooms.

"Breaking ground on the Belmont Plaza Pool marks a historic step forward in delivering a facility that reflects the pride, history and future of Long Beach," Mayor Rex Richardson said in a statement.

The Long Beach City Council approved a \$105 million spending plan for the pool in January.

Most of its budget, about \$77 million, is funded through the city's Tidelands Fund, which relies on oil revenue. Another \$28 million will be covered, officials said, by sponsorship revenue, small-time grants and a \$24.5 million bond they originally hoped to issue this summer.

To help pay back that debt, the city proposed in January to charge for parking at 1,800 spaces around the Alamitos Bay Marina that are currently free. If at least a fifth of those spaces — charged at \$2 an hour — are filled at any given time, the meters would generate \$3 million annually. The plan to issue bonds still needs approval from the City Council.

Officials previously said they would come back with a debt issuance plan in June, after scheduling public hearings to solicit feedback.



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

But months later, several neighborhood groups, associations and members of the Long Beach Marine Advisory Commission say they're still waiting for a meeting.

"Despite repeated requests, we've only been told we might get an update in the summer, which is puzzling since the project has already begun," wrote Joan Palango, the executive vice president of the Long Beach Marina Boat Owners Association.

Long Beach has tried to start charging for those spaces before, saying it's rare to find free beachfront parking in a city of its size. But the idea, last studied in 2022, was rejected by the Marine Advisory Commission the same year over concerns it would unfairly tax waterside patrons.

Jocelin Padilla, a spokesperson for Long Beach Public Works, said the city will start a parking study shortly after Memorial Day and through the summer that counts the number of cars that park along the marina and how frequently they turn over.

From there, Padilla said the plan is to host community engagement in the "late summer" and then put together a proposed parking management program that will be submitted to the Coastal Commission for permitting approval.

Joshua Smith, a spokesperson for the coastal commission, said a typical turnaround for permitting approval



Courtesy of the city of Long Beach

Top: A sign marks the future site of the Belmont Pool complex, which is set to be finished in time for the 2028 Olympics in Long Beach on Thursday, May 21, 2026. Bottom: This rendering shows the latest plans for the Belmont Pool complex.

once it's submitted can take about 47 days, depending on the current caseload.

The pool's groundbreaking comes after 13 years of delays, backtracks and revisions to replace the temporary city pool that was installed in 2013 after its 45-year-old predecessor was deemed seismically unsafe. City planners say the temporary pool will remain at least through construction. Afterward, the city and Coastal Commission — which holds authority on seaside projects statewide — will decide whether to close it.

Previous plans for the new pool ranged in price between \$60 million and \$145 million. It was originally envisioned as a \$119 million domed natatorium that was later pared down by rising costs, declining oil revenues, environmental challenges and mandates by the Coastal Commission.

Ahead of the groundbreaking, the project has already cost \$23.2 million, largely for designs, redesigns, studies and permitting, including work from a dozen different consultants. ■

Stretch of old Red Car tracks that became parkland to get long-awaited facelift

By John Donegan

A two-acre slice of parkland that runs diagonally between 8th Street and 10th Street near Wilson High School is slated to get new trees, landscaping and seating — a project that will complete its transformation from an old railway right-of-way into a welcoming greenspace.

The land was once used by Pacific Electric, whose Red Car trains used to slash diagonally across the area from Wrigley to the Colorado Lagoon. For years, Long Beach has been slowly converting a 9.2-acre stretch of the former railway into parkland between 4th Street and Park Avenue to 11th Street and Loma.

This portion, called the 10th Street Greenbelt, runs between Termino and Grand avenues. It was outfitted with a 900-foot concrete path in 2022. This next phase will add 48 Redbud, Oak, and Sycamore trees, native shrubs, solar lighting, boulder and bench seating, and several granite auxiliary trails that connect the surrounding neighborhoods to the path. There are no plans for restrooms or tables, officials said.

Plans were informed largely by a survey and feedback gathered over the last four years by the Greenbelt Heights Neighborhood Association. Officials say surveys consistently pointed out a need for more seating, native plants and improved drainage in the nearby neighborhoods.

Sharon Turner, the association's president, said it's been a 15-year effort that originally inspired the creation of the neighborhood group. For years, the path was "a dumping area of tall grass," she said. Now, the association is planning to hold meetings at the park.

"It's been a long haul," Turner said. "We've been really happy with the support, but it definitely started as a local resident push, and we got some support once it got legs."

Planned for construction in early 2027, it is hoped to be finished by that fall. The project has a \$2.58 million budget, mostly funded by a \$1.5 million county grant. ■



The city of Long Beach provided this rendering of plans for the revamped 10th Street Greenbelt.

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Single Gen Z women outpace Gen Z men to homeownership despite decline in first-time buyers

By Associated Press

Single Gen Z women are outpacing their male counterparts when it comes to buying a home.

They accounted for 35% of all homebuyers in their generation, while single Gen Z men represented 18%, according to survey data from the National Association of Realtors.

NAR surveyed people who bought a home between July 2024 and June 2025. The survey included homebuyers from several generations, from Gen Z, ages 18-26, to the Silent Generation, ages 80 to 100. No other generation had a bigger share of single women homebuyers than Gen Z.

Overall Gen Zers, which the survey defines as those born between 1999 and 2011, still only made up 4% of all homebuyers during the survey period. And at the time of the survey, the share of U.S. homes bought by first-time buyers of all ages sank to the lowest level on record going back to 1981.

First-time buyers often don't have equity from a previous home to put toward a down payment. That was the situation for Bri LaFluer. After years of socking away half her pay, working two jobs and aided by a slowing housing market, she bought her own home in 2023 at the age of 24.

"I've always been a really independent person and I just wanted my own place to have peace and quiet by myself," said LaFluer, now 27.

Her home search began in 2021, but historically low mortgage rates made the market ultra competitive, which turbocharged prices. Two years later she finally landed a house in Baldwinsville, N.Y., about 15 miles from Syracuse, that was built in 1900 and has three bedrooms and 1.5-baths and a big yard. She got it for \$175,000.

"I feel like it was meant to be and this just ended up being the perfect house for me and my dogs," she said.

A content creator for a video game company, LaFluer lived with her mom and paid a modest rent, which helped her save up faster for the \$20,000 down payment.

The NAR survey data are the latest sign that single women overall are becoming homeowners at greater rates than single men. Gen Z homebuyers are much more likely than homebuyers in all other generations to be unmarried. But single women across the generations made up a quarter of all homebuyers in the July 2024-June 2025 period, according to NAR. Single men, meanwhile, accounted for 11% of all home purchases.

This has been a longstanding trend going back at least to 1981. In 2006, at the height of the mid-2000s housing boom, the share of homes bought by single women peaked at 22%, according to NAR. For single men, their share of homeownership peaked at 12% in 2010.



A realty sign hangs outside a home for sale in Los Angeles Monday, Oct 27, 2014.

AP Photo by Nick Ut

Experts say there is no one-size-fits-all answer to why across the generations single women outnumber single men as homeowners.

Women now are outpacing men in college attendance, which can lead to higher incomes, said Jessica Lautz, NAR's deputy chief economist.

They tend to have a strong desire for homeownership as a way to secure their independence, something they historically could not easily do alone.

"It wasn't until the 1970s where women were legally protected to have a mortgage on their own," Lautz said. "And they have embraced this and been very strongly embracing this."

Aspiring Gen Z homeowners face a number of challenges to affording a home: They're typically just getting started in their careers, with their best income-earning years ahead. They are unlikely to be married and may have student loans to pay off.

Their median annual income of \$76,000, as of 2024, also was the lowest compared to homebuyers from all other generations, according to NAR.

Years of soaring home prices have further stretched the limits of affordability. While home price growth has slowed and prices have fallen in many metro areas, prices are mostly still rising. The median U.S. home sales price stood at \$417,700 last month, up 0.9% from a year earlier, according to NAR.

Still, Gen Z homebuyers are also more likely to receive financial help from family, and many are savvy about looking into community grants or other payment assistance programs for first-time homebuyers. And 1 in 10 tapped their 401(k) retirement savings plan to put toward their down

payment, according to NAR.

Other home shoppers have no recourse but to save up on their own.

That's what Mariah Berry focused on when many of her fellow college grads were going out and living it up.

"I did not go out and was driving an old beat-up car," said Berry, a social media content creator. "It was not fun."

The penny-pinching paid off in 2023, when Berry bought her two-bedroom, one-bath home in Charleston, Tennessee, a small town about 45 miles outside of Chattanooga. She was just 23.

Berry had always wanted to be a homeowner, but the goal took on more urgency after a period when she and her boyfriend were bouncing

between living in short-term rentals or couch surfing with friends.

Berry got her home, one of two units in a ranch-style duplex, for \$218,000. She financed the balance after making a \$7,000 down payment with a 30-year mortgage at 6% interest.

"I do think it's pretty frickin' awesome that I'm a homeowner and that I became a homeowner at 23," she said. "I will say that after I put in the offer, I wanted to puke. I was like, 'Oh my God, did I do the right thing?'"

Berry's now looking at the possibility of buying the other half of the duplex some day.

"That could be a good opportunity for us to have and like rent out half of it," she said. ■

Richardson *from page 1*

accessible, good high-paying union jobs in our city," he said. "We're going to continue to attract companies as the fastest growing aerospace cluster in America in Space Beach. We're going to continue building housing in every part of our city."

Richardson used his speech to reiterate his plan to remake Long Beach as an entertainment and sports destination.

He gestured for the crowd to look right, toward the newly built coastal amphitheater. "The industries of the past will not serve us well in the future," Richardson said.

Richardson first won his seat in a 2022 general election with 56.6% of the vote, or 63,184 ballots, over then-Councilmember Suzie Price.

None of his challengers this year

had as much political experience as Price, and Richardson substantially outtraised them all.

Richardson spent more than \$358,000, pulling from the \$472,000 raised through donations from powerful unions, established Democratic colleagues and many of the defense companies he has helped bring to the city. By comparison, nonprofit executive Terri Rivers spent \$17,000, and Sweeney spent nearly \$10,000.

The mayor's race in Long Beach is a tough one for political newcomers. The city has not elected a mayor who hasn't first sat on the City Council since Beverly O'Neill's inaugural win in 1994.

You can see the most up-to-date vote totals in all of Long Beach's races at results.lavote.gov. ■

Rare East Long Beach affordable housing project breaks ground

The project was able to move forward after a settlement with neighbors who sued.

By John Donegan

Builders, dignitaries, city planners and passers-by gathered May 28 to kick off construction of a new, 73-unit affordable housing complex a few blocks south of the Traffic Circle — a rare sight in East Long Beach. It's the first to be approved and break ground in the city's 3rd City Council District that covers well-off neighborhoods in southeast Long Beach.

The \$66.1 million project at 4151 E. Fountain St., once complete, will offer dozens of apartments between two complexes — a four-story, 50-unit building and a three-story, 23-unit building — for those earning 30-60% of the area's median income.

That includes 21 three-bedroom, 16 two-bedroom and 36 one-bedroom homes. A quarter of the homes are designated for residents with disabilities. Dubbed Thrive, it's expected to open by late 2027.

"Affordability is the most central issue facing all of our families, and the largest contributor, the largest thing that we all pay for is housing. And so, the more affordable housing we build, the more we can support our families," Mayor Rex Richardson said, hailing the construction.

At the site, there will be vehicle parking and bike slots, a communi-



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

Construction begins for a 73-unit housing project in Long Beach on Thursday, May 28, 2026.

ty room, courtyard and playground equipment, as well as quick access to nearby bus stops, library and Recreation Park.

Standing on a dirt incline in front of the construction site, Suny Lay Chang, president and chief operating officer of Linc Housing Corporation, said that the project has come after years of headaches and challenges.

The property was the site of a youth mental health facility until its closure in 2015 over an array of violations and mismanagement. The city took over the property in 2017 and sought proposals to devel-

op it in 2022. The old facility was demolished in June 2024, but in the interim dealt with homeless people living in or trespassing for years, according to city officials.

Separately in May 2024, a coalition of neighbors sued to block the housing development, alleging the city's approval process circumvented their concerns about clogged traffic, a lack of parking and loss of privacy.

The site is a block from Bryant Elementary School, which can enter gridlock during drop-off and pick-up hours. Both Fountain Street and Wehrle Court, which intersect with

the site, are also narrow with little available parking.

Eventually, the city, Linc Housing and neighbors agreed to a legal settlement in which the housing nonprofit would purchase a third parcel of land that connects the site to Anaheim Street to use as an entrance and exit from the complex. The developer also agreed to pay legal fees, remove the rooftop deck from the northern building and limit roof access hours to the other building.

"This project is really one with lots of battle scars and a lot of stories," Chang said.

Long Beach has been under pressure from the state to enable the construction of more affordable housing in "high resource" neighborhoods like this one. Historically, developments remained clustered in downtown, North and Central Long Beach despite a spike in demand.

Linc Housing has more than 400 units across Long Beach, including two new apartment complexes that opened last year. The nonprofit also has plans to convert its headquarters at 3590 Elm Avenue into a 109-unit apartment complex.

It mirrors a similar push by the city, which officials say has entitled about 6,000 homes in the past three-and-a-half years.

"We're producing housing at a rate that we haven't in decades and decades and decades," said Long Beach Community Development Director Christopher Koontz. ■

Fireworks from page 1

at the Queen Mary, according to the application reviewed by the Long Beach Business Journal.

On May 21, Coastal Commission staff approved most of the plan but told Long Beach they'd have to scale it back. In a letter, they said the city could have only two extra barges, one near Cherry Avenue and one near Bay Shore Avenue, in addition to the Queen Mary location.

The shows will be free and last about 20 minutes, according to the documents. The city hasn't announced any other details.

The Coastal Commission, which enforces environmental and public access rules along the California coast, is also requiring the city to organize a beach cleanup on July 5, and it must monitor nearby nesting bird habitats to make sure they're not disrupted by the show.

The Coastal Commission has been putting tight controls on fireworks in recent years.

They refused to permit the annual Big Bang on the Bay July 3 fireworks show over Alamitos Bay after the organizer said he couldn't follow their instructions to switch to drones. Harm to nesting birds was a key reason for their decision.

The city's barges off the coast will be required to be at least 2,800 feet away from any nesting habitat.



Sarahi Apaez/Long Beach Business Journal

Families watch as fireworks light up Alamitos Bay in Long Beach on Sunday, July 3, 2022.

The Coastal Commission letter also cited the fact that it's a one-time event as a reason they were willing to approve the extra barges.

The Coastal Commission's OK isn't required for the city's annual show at the Queen Mary. The commission gave the Port of Long Beach the authority over that area many years ago under a master plan it approved for the whole port complex. Then in 1992,

the port transferred that authority over the Queen Mary property to the city of Long Beach, according to City Attorney Dawn McIntosh.

That complicated regulatory framework means the Queen Mary show must still abide by the same water quality rules as other shows, but it's allowed to escape any extra scrutiny from the Coastal Commission. ■

HEALTHCARE

Amid spike in traumatic injuries, city to ban high-powered e-bikes on sidewalks

From 2023 to 2025, Long Beach Memorial Hospital's trauma department alone has seen 168 e-bike-related injuries.

By John Donegan

The Long Beach City Council last month agreed to draft a law banning higher-powered electric bikes from all city sidewalks, saying they pose a threat to pedestrians and should be used elsewhere.

The ban, proposed by Councilmember Daryl Supernaw, would still allow slower e-bikes that max out at 20 mph on residential sidewalks, but Class 3 e-bikes, which are capable of speeds up to 28 mph, wouldn't be allowed on any sidewalks.

The originally proposed ban would have also extended to the city's multi-use pathways, such as the shoreline path and those along the Los Angeles and San Gabriel rivers, as well as those that cut through El Dorado and Heartwell Parks, but the council agreed to scale back that proposal for now and reconsider in six months.

Councilmember Megan Kerr said a blanket ban would unfairly penalize those who ride the higher-powered Class 3 e-bikes on paths to ferry children and their belongings to work or home. She urged the body to pause adoption until a later date, to allow the city to gather data and recommend which paths should be exempt.

"I hesitate to go to the most restrictive in this moment when we can step up to more restrictive as we get additional information," Kerr said. "I would hate to limit a safe form of travel for folks with a blanket that we're not so sure about."

The ordinance follows the growing prevalence of electronic bikes and



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

A man rides an e-bike on the sidewalk on Broadway in Downtown Long Beach on Thursday, May 14, 2026.

motorcycles, and complaints about their use on sidewalks and footpaths, where an increasing number of pedestrians worry about being struck.

Supernaw brought the item forward in October, after being inundated with complaints about dangerous riding along the San Gabriel River pathway.

"I didn't realize it could devolve to where it is now," he said. "It certainly didn't get better on its own."

Electric bikes, motorcycles and dirt bikes have surged in popularity in recent years, especially among teenagers who see them as a new means of freedom and adrenaline.

But the vehicles' high speeds come with real dangers. From 2023 to 2025, Long Beach Memorial Hospital's trauma department alone has seen 168 e-bike-related injuries.

Edna Transon, a nurse and program manager at MemorialCare, said their trauma bay has seen a spike in serious injuries — skull fractures,

brain damage, broken ribs and lacerations — that require multiple surgeries and longer recovery times.

"They're not scrapes, they're not bumps, they're not bruises, they're not even a regular fracture, they're way more serious," Transon said. "You've seen loss of legs, loss of life."

City and hospital data show that a large number of riders are teens, especially those aged 10 to 17, though those coming into trauma bays — riders and pedestrians alike — are as young as 5 and old as 92.

Most of the effort to regulate e-bikes has been fought at the state level and in schools. Under California law, e-bikes and e-motorcycles are separately classified by motor power, top speed and whether the bike has working pedals. Class 1 and 2 e-bikes, which go up to 20 mph, don't require licenses or insurance, while Class 3 riders must be at least 16.

Last month, State Attorney Gener-

al Rob Bonta issued a consumer alert to retailers, parents and manufacturers that warned of the current laws and pending legislation around the devices. At his prodding, Amazon last week also announced it would stop selling higher-powered e-bikes in California.

But the danger around the bikes has prompted nearby cities, counties and school districts to take strong stances against their usage, especially around Class 3 e-bikes.

Starting next year, elementary and middle school students at the Newport-Mesa Unified School District are banned from commuting on e-bikes, following a school board vote last month. School districts in Palos Verdes and Redondo Beach require safety courses for students.

And Huntington Beach, which bans e-bikes on sidewalks and requires riders to dismount in some areas downtown, has used child endangerment statutes to go after the parents of minors who injure or kill someone with e-motos or overpowered e-bikes.

Long Beach police say they have limited enforcement options for law-flouting cyclists and won't pursue riders for a simple traffic violation, saying a serious crime needs to have been committed.

LBPD Commander Shaleana Benson said the department is capable of using a drone to follow cyclists until officers can either divert them from a high-traffic area or issue them citations and potentially impound the bike if it can go over 20 mph.

But police say they would rather help start a diversion program, citing data that a large swathe of problematic riders are teenagers at local schools. But they said that would require new funding and additional staffing. City officials also warn they can only control where these bikes are used, and cannot outright ban their sale, classification and power limits.

"A lot of things are being tested out right now," said Paul Van Dyk, a city traffic engineer with Long Beach Public Works. ■

Californians without health insurance could double, state analyst warns

By Aaron Schrank, LAist

This article was originally published by LAist on May 4.

The number of Californians without health insurance could double from 2 million today to 4 million by 2030, according to a report from the state Legislative Analyst's Office. It's the state budget office's preliminary attempt to quantify how federal legislation known as the "One Big Beautiful Bill" will reshape healthcare access statewide.

The One Big Beautiful Bill is driving nearly 90% of the projected coverage loss, according to the LAO report. It's mostly Medi-Cal enrollees who are expected to be dropped when new

work requirements take effect in 2027. The remaining 10% are largely people leaving the state's health insurance marketplace, Covered California, after enhanced federal premium subsidies expired last year.

What's the impact to coverage?

L.A. County officials estimate that recent Medi-Cal changes could put coverage at risk for hundreds of thousands of residents and cost the health departments about \$800 million a year. A UC Berkeley Labor Center analysis projected more than 1 million Medi-Cal enrollees could lose coverage by 2028.

The LAO report also warns that county indigent health programs for uninsured residents will soon face

a surge in demand they're not prepared to meet. Those county programs had enrolled about 850,000 people statewide before the federal government expanded Medicaid coverage in 2014. Total enrollment is currently 10,000 statewide, but the trend is going to reverse, according to the report.

What's the impact to healthcare providers?

More uninsured people means hospitals and clinics provide more services without getting paid. The LAO projects that uncompensated care costs at hospitals could grow by several billion dollars statewide by 2030. Clinics face steeper losses because they run on smaller budgets

and depend more heavily on Medi-Cal revenue.

The LAO also projects premiums on the individual health insurance market will rise as healthier people drop coverage.

What are proposals to help?

The LAO itself doesn't recommend new spending and instead urges lawmakers to track what happens to hospitals, clinics and county programs before taking action. But both L.A. County and state officials are pushing tax efforts to combat federal cuts.

A November statewide ballot initiative would impose a one-time 5% tax on Californians worth over \$1 billion and direct 90% of proceeds to Medi-Cal. ■



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

Voting signs are posted around a church that is serving as a temporary polling center in Long Beach on Tuesday, June 2, 2026.

Voters narrowly pass countywide sales tax increase to backfill healthcare cuts

Measure ER will increase Long Beach's rate to 11.25%

By Barbara Kingsley-Wilson and Scott Wilson

The latest tallies show Los Angeles County voters have approved Measure ER, a proposed sales tax increase that supporters said would help offset hundreds of millions of dollars in federal healthcare funding cuts and prevent service reductions at clinics, hospitals and medical programs across the region.

The measure lagged behind in early returns on election night, but the yes vote steadily gained ground as the Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder counted mail-in and provisional ballots in the week afterward.

Results as of June 11 showed the measure narrowly ahead, with 50.5% voting yes. It needed a simple majority countywide to pass.

Measure ER raises the countywide sales tax by 0.5% for five years, increasing the rate from 9.75% to 10.25%. In Long Beach, the combined sales tax would reach 11% in October and 11.25% next year when a previously approved local tax increase takes effect.

Supporters said the tax will be a critical lifeline for a healthcare system facing steep federal reductions tied to the "One Big Beautiful Bill Act," signed into law by President Donald Trump last year.

The Trump bill is expected to slash \$800 million annually from the county's health department — more than \$2 billion through 2028 — and force up to 1.1 million Californians to lose their insurance coverage

from Medi-Cal, the state's version of Medicaid. About 120,000 residents in Long Beach, about 26% of the city's population, are on Medi-Cal.

County officials estimate Measure ER will generate approximately \$960 million annually. While the money could be spent on any county program, supporters say it would support community clinics, school-based health centers and Planned Parenthood facilities throughout L.A. County, while also providing direct allocations to local health departments.

Because Long Beach operates its own health department, Mayor Rex Richardson expected the city to directly receive roughly \$8 million annually under the measure. The city has reported an \$18 million reduction in federal funding, resulting in the elimination of 44 positions and cuts to programs, including nutrition education and mobile HIV testing.

Opponents maintained that residents could not afford another tax increase amid rising housing, fuel and living costs. Critics also questioned the measure's structure as a general tax, noting that revenue would flow into the county's general fund rather than a legally protected healthcare account.

Long Beach Councilmember Cindy Allen, who opposed the measure, argued during the campaign that taxpayers should not be expected to make up for federal funding reductions. "I understand the importance of these services, but not on the back of taxpayers," said Allen.

Collections for the new sales tax are set to start in October, with funding available in January. ■

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EDUCATION

Challenger who alarmed teachers union trails incumbent school board president

Fearing the newcomer would institute a conservative agenda, the union spent massively to support veteran LBUSD trustee Diana Craighead.

By Kate Raphael

A school board candidate who received enormous financial backing from the teachers union — approaching \$200,000 — was in a celebratory mood at her election watch party on June 2.

Though some ballots are still being counted, as of June 10, incumbent Diana Craighead had 55% of the vote, a commanding lead over her two challengers in an unusually heated school board primary.

If Craighead receives over 50% of the vote, she'll win the seat outright and avoid a November runoff against the second finisher.

The race for the District 5 seat, which covers northeast Long Beach and parts of Lakewood, has been a historically one-horse competition. Craighead, a liberal candidate promoting student success and equity, has held the position for 14 years and



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal
Diana Craighead speaks during a Long Beach Unified School District school board meeting on Monday, July 16, 2018.

faced only one opponent in that time. But the stakes rose this year when grassroots organizer Sara Pol-Lim and charter school teacher Maureen Flaherty announced their candidacies.

Flaherty champions vaccine choice, exclusion of trans girls from girls' sports and parental control over books and curriculum. Her ties to conservative

groups, including Moms for Liberty, prompted the teachers union, one of the heaviest hitters in Long Beach education, to pour \$175,000 into Craighead's campaign in an effort to keep Flaherty out of office.

That money comes from the union's own political action committee and the California Teachers Asso-

ciation, which can fund local PACs in special circumstances. Combined, the contributions have funded mailers, a promotional ad for Craighead, an attack ad against Flaherty, door-knocking and opposition research.

Flaherty fought back, sending out her own mailers, texts and attack ads, positioning herself as the change candidate and dragging Craighead and the current school board leadership. She said that in the last month, her campaign has gained significant momentum, though she has had to contend with disparaging posters plastered around her neighborhood as well as the theft of her lawn signs around town.

Compared to Craighead, Flaherty has reported orders of magnitude less spending and campaign contributions, but she has sought her own list of endorsements from conservative politicians and leaders, including gubernatorial hopeful Chad Bianco, the current sheriff of Riverside County. Flaherty even resorted to planting her campaign lawn sign in front of the teachers union headquarters, according to video surveillance reviewed by the Long Beach Business Journal.

Challenger page 18

Teachers negotiate raises even as district braces for cuts

LBUSD educators will get a 1% permanent wage hike and a one-time 1.5% payment if a new tentative agreement is ratified.

By Kate Raphael

After forgoing raises last year because of the Long Beach Unified's looming financial problems, the school district and its teachers union reached a tentative agreement for 2025-26 that would give educators a modest pay bump.

If the agreement is ratified, certificated employees — including teachers, nurses and librarians — will receive a 1% permanent wage hike and a one-time 1.5% payment retroactive to the beginning of this school year.

Last year's contract, ratified by union members in December after protracted negotiations, did not increase pay — a blow to teachers after years of consistent, large compensation wins. That outcome reflected the district's worsening finances, as declining enrollment, expiring pandemic relief funds and rising costs forced LBUSD into deficit spending.

This year, only a limited set of items, including compensation, opened for bargaining (the entire contract is up only every three years), and "the pressure was raised" for a salary bump, said Peder Larsen, vice president of the teachers union. "Inflation has been pretty painful over the last few years, so going a year without a raise was hurting our members," he added.

Although higher pay was a priority in negotiations, the district's financial reality was "the



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

In this file photo, teachers and supporters rally against layoffs outside of the Long Beach Unified School District offices before a school board meeting in Long Beach, Wednesday, Dec. 10, 2025.

elephant in the room," Larsen said.

At a board meeting on June 3, district administrators presented a sobering budget update. Enrollment continues to decline and is expected to dip below 60,000 students for the first time next school year. Attendance has not rebounded to pre-pandemic levels. Because state funding is closely tied to attendance and enrollment, both trends drain the revenue LBUSD receives, said Yumi Takahashi, chief business and financial officer for the district.

Administrators also announced a rare piece of good financial news: A recent revision from the governor's office means that LBUSD expects to get more money from the state, improving the district's outlook. While the district is projected to finish this school

year operating at a deficit of \$72.4 million, next year's projected deficit has fallen to \$34.8 million, according to the updated budget. Still, administrators projected the district will have to dip into its reserves again next year, for the third year in a row.

The district has already cut \$47 million, and plans to cut tens of millions more in the coming years as part of their fiscal stabilization plan, administrators said. The district sent layoff notices to hundreds of educators on special contracts earlier this year. Though some were called back, many think broader layoffs are on the horizon.

Those factors meant that "bargaining wasn't straightforward," Larsen said. He had expected negotiations to roll over into the next school year because the district had recently offered a one-time payment but no ongoing salary increase, a "nonstarter," Larsen said. Then, at the final bargaining session of the year, the district agreed to offer a 1% permanent pay raise, and both sides reached an agreement, which has been recommended for a yes vote by the union executive board and the bargaining team.

In addition to the raise, healthcare will remain premium-free for members. The agreement also includes a new section expanding protections for victims of violence, reflecting a recent state law.

This "is the best deal that they could come up with right now," said Larsen of the bargaining team, made up of educators who represent different grade levels, position types and interests across the union.

Voting opened June 4 for union members to decide whether or not to ratify the contract. If they do, as Larsen predicts, the agreement will go before the school board for final approval. ■

Lawsuit claims long-tenured CSULB tennis coach was forced out based on age, gender

Jenny Hilt-Costello alleges that Athletics Department officials questioned her motivation, told her to work on communicating with Gen Z.

By Jacob Sisneros

A decorated Cal State Long Beach tennis coach has filed a lawsuit against the CSU system and the university's athletic director, alleging that she was forced out last year based on her age and gender.

Jenny Hilt-Costello had coached the women's tennis team at CSULB for nearly 30 years when she retired in May 2025. She left as the program's winningest coach, leading the team to 414 career wins and 22 Big West Titles. She also beat ovarian cancer while coaching the program.

But her lawsuit, filed last month in Los Angeles Superior Court, alleges that she "felt forced out" by Athletic Director Bobby Smitheran, who left her "no other option but to leave CSULB," her attorneys wrote.

In an email, CSULB spokesperson Jeffrey Cook wrote that the university disagreed "with the merits of the complaint."

Hilt-Costello's lawsuit seeks \$2.5 million from the CSU: \$2 million in losses arising from mental and emotional distress, plus \$500,000 in lost wages.

Smitheran was hired to lead the university's Athletic Department in August 2023. When Hilt-Costello



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

A Cal State University Long Beach student walks past the university tennis courts under the beaming sun in Long Beach on Monday, June 2, 2026.

first met Smitheran for a one-on-one meeting a month later, Smitheran "repeatedly" asked her when she was going to retire, her lawsuit alleges.

She responded by saying that she was 51 years old and planned to take it year by year once she reached 55. During the meeting, she requested a three-year extension to her contract, which was set to expire in May 2024.

Shortly before that contract expired, the two met again, at which time Smitheran allegedly questioned her "overall motivation" and suggested she "take a step back" by letting her assistant coach, 25-year-old Gertjan De Wilder, run practices because he "might better communicate with" the young student-athletes, her law-

yers wrote in the lawsuit.

According to Hilt-Costello, Associate Athletic Director Sean Ferrera also questioned her ability to communicate with Gen Z — and suggested she listen to podcasts and read literature to learn "how to better communicate" with the younger generation of student-athletes.

In her lawsuit, Hilt-Costello alleged that both instances violated the Fair Employment and Housing Act, which prohibits employers from discriminating on a wide range of factors, including age and gender.

Ultimately, Hilt-Costello was not granted her request for a three-year deal and was instead offered a one-year extension in May 2024. At the

time, she alleges, Smitheran told her not to think the one-year offer was "some sinister plan to push you out."

After that contract agreement, Smitheran continued to add stipulations, including mental health check-ins for the team, "Gen Z" trainings and requiring Deputy Athletic Director Gladie Jaffe to accompany the team on trips, Hilt-Costello alleged.

One of Hilt-Costello's attorneys, Devon Lyon, said the university's athletic department also tried to use comments from student-athletes as a reason to fire Hilt-Costello — that she was "old school," too focused on winning rather than emotional well-being and that she was either too emotional or not emotional enough.

In the complaint, her lawyers alleged that "these are complaints female coaches face when they coach the same way successful male coaches do."

In December of that year, Hilt-Costello's lawsuit says she informed the athletic department she would not pursue another contract, citing "emotional distress" from the way Smitheran had dealt with her.

"She loved the job, she loved the student-athletes, she loved being a tennis coach and to just have this new administration come in and use all of these things to try and criticize her, it was really devastating for her," Lyon said.

Cook, the university spokesperson, declined to comment on the specific allegations laid out in the lawsuit or say if the university investigated Hilt-Costello's claims before her retirement.

"Coach Hilt-Costello's remarkable and successful career of more than a quarter of a century at Long Beach State should not have ended this way," Lyon said. ■

Mercedes-Benz to close Long Beach design facility

At least 72 local jobs will be eliminated, according to a state filing.

By John Donegan

Mercedes-Benz, looking to consolidate its research endeavors in Atlanta, said last month it plans to close its Long Beach research and design facility by the end of the year.

Company officials said the closure would begin July 6 and wrap up by the end of December, resulting in the local loss of at least 72 high-paying jobs at the 32,100 square-foot facility at 4035 Via Oro Avenue on the western edge of Long Beach.

Positions include engineers, technicians, lawyers and project managers, according to a May 7 filing with the state's employment department.

It's unclear how many people will be fired or transferred. Some will choose between accepting a severance package or transferring to another facility in Atlanta, Ann Arbor, Mich., or San Jose. Others, according to the filing, were offered severance

without an option to relocate "based on business and operational needs."

Workers who spoke to the Long Beach Business Journal on the condition of anonymity said most would relocate to Atlanta, where the company plans to build a \$34 million facility near its new North American headquarters in Sandy Springs, a suburb about 16 miles north of the major city.

The facility is set to be completed in August, the Georgia governor's office said in a news release.

The Long Beach facility, which opened in 1997, is responsible for nearly 100 technology patents, according to Mercedes-Benz, ranging from "powertrain development" to autonomous driving and in-car features. It has about 186 employees.

It was listed for sale earlier this year.

Long Beach Councilmember Tunua Thrash-Ntuk said her office is actively trying to pair laid-off workers with employment elsewhere in the city. "We are fully committed to helping workers identify their next opportunity right here in Long Beach," she wrote in a statement. ■



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

Mercedes-Benz Research and Development in Long Beach, Wednesday, June 18, 2025

Queen Mary may downsize, cut events to make room for amphitheater schedule

By John Donegan

Margaritas on the Mary. Boots on the Bay. Eccentric bingo and era-specific orchestral dance.

Visitors to the Queen Mary may have to bid farewell or expect fewer bookings for some of the ship's long-standing programs that may need to be rescheduled — or ended altogether — to accommodate the start of shows at the city's new waterfront amphitheater this summer.

Steve Caloca, managing director of the Queen Mary, confirmed Wednesday that planners are reviewing about a dozen regular events to see if they need to be shuffled around or cut.

Staff has already begun to contact some performers and vendors that might be affected, which could include Candlelight Concerts, Studio 354 disco nights on first Saturdays, Murder Mystery Dinner and Brushes and Bubbly, among others. They will also look at scaling back availability aboard the ship for private catering and parties, as well as events scheduled during holidays like St. Patrick's Day and in the weeks leading up to Christmas.

The reason: a lack of parking. There's a total of 750 car slots between the two venues — 350 for guests on the ship and 400 for VIP and premium attendees at the soon-to-open amphitheater. The ship already hosts about 150 events a year — weddings, galas, luncheons — that draw thousands of people, leaving officials lamenting there simply isn't enough parking to go around.

That is further complicated by the 11,000-seat amphitheater that opened with its first show on June 6. Event planners expect many attendees to stay at the hotel aboard the Queen Mary, or at least want to hang out aboard before or after it ends. That same day, Caloca said, the Queen Mary expects 1,400 people aboard the ship for a catering event.

"We want as many events here on the Queen Mary as possible," Caloca said. "And we've been doing a record number of events, and we love doing it, ... but with the amphitheater opening, it is going to use a significant amount of parking spots. So the last thing we want to do is be a disservice to our customers (and) our guests by saying have your event here at the Queen, and then there's just not enough parking."

The \$21.3 million amphitheater is the city's most visible example of a yearslong strategy to wean itself off a reliance on local oil production and rebrand itself as an entertainment capital.

The city hopes the venue will generate up to \$3 million in revenue each year — enough to pay off its con-



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

struction debt after five years and put a dent in the city's budget shortfalls — between \$6.2 million and \$10 million annually through 2035 — caused by declining petrodollars.

Officials will need to figure out how to have its newest venue coexist with other revenue generators-turned-neighbors, like the Queen Mary, which officials say turned an operating profit in 2023 and 2024 after years of struggling to make money.

For now, Caloca says it's too early to say whether specific programs will be ended. The plan moving forward is to squeeze in events where they can and downsize where they must. Some events, like the country-themed dance party Boots on the Boat, have already been reshuffled from the weekend to midweek. "And we still get a good turnout," he added.

But others might not be so lucky. Alex Mendham, who leads an 11-person orchestral band, says his monthly program's performance was canceled following a dispute with the ship managers over late payments.

Mendham's band first began playing aboard the ship in June 2023, quickly becoming a monthly program with performances for the ship's Christmas and New Year's celebrations in their main ballroom. In that time, he says invoices were late nine times — four of those times were more than a month behind. Their Dec. 27 performance, for example, was invoiced on Dec. 20 but went unpaid until March 9.

Late payments — \$6,750 for each gig — forced Mendham to pay his bandmates out of pocket and wait for reimbursement by the Queen Mary. The inconsistency, he said, led to several musicians quitting or refusing to work with him.

In February, he raised complaints



Brandon Richardson/Long Beach Business Journal

Top: The Queen Mary serves as a backdrop for the new F&M Bank Amphitheater in Long Beach on Thursday, June 4, 2026. Bottom: Two bicyclists ride past the Queen Mary on Monday, January 30, 2023.

with the ship's operators that carried over for weeks. Then, he said, dates for performances in April, May, August and September were canceled.

After a performance on March 7, Mendham got a call from Caloca's assistant. "Because of amphitheater construction, they're having to scale back a lot of their events, and as a result, the orchestra is no longer required," he recalled.

He and his wife, Caroline Adamy, brought the issue to the city, which owns the Queen Mary, earlier this month, offering a timeline of late payments and other issues.

"They don't want us to be on the ship anymore," Mendham said. "They don't want us to perform there."

In a May 15 response, Johnny Vallejo, deputy director of the city's Economic Development Department, assured the ship's purchase order system has since been fixed and reiterated that the show's cancellation was tied directly to parking concerns and that his series "isn't the

only programming reconsidered."

"There may have been an assumption from the vendors that the series would be continued indefinitely, but ... we're going to be bringing so many visitors onto the campus, guests and visitors on site ... we just have to be careful on how we're managing events throughout the campus," Vallejo said.

Caloca declined to comment on accusations that the cancellation was due to retaliation, saying his discussions with vendors are private.

But he and Vallejo both said an offer has been made for Mendham's performance to return next year, this time on a quarterly basis. Caloca added he's even open to Mendham performing for this upcoming New Year's celebration.

"We've always had a good relationship with (Mendham) in the past," Caloca said. "... We just need to make sure that it's the best business decision for the ship." ■



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

In this file photo, the A Line makes its way through Downtown Long Beach.

Does Long Beach deserve more say over Metro?

There's a push for a dedicated board member.

By John Donegan

County leaders this summer may take up a vote to add a seat exclusively for Long Beach on the Los Angeles County Metro's Board of Directors, the agency that oversees the nation's second-largest transit system.

In a letter to a board committee in late May, County Supervisor Janice Hahn, whose district includes Long Beach, argued that many of the county's 88 cities are underrepresented on the agency's board, leading to planning and funding decisions that favor the city of Los Angeles at the expense of farther-flung municipalities.

"We have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to shape a Metro Board that better represents the diversity of our vast county as well as the needs of people who regularly rely on Metro," Hahn said. "Long Beach is the second-biggest city in LA County and a regional powerhouse. It's time that its almost half a million residents had a dedicated, permanent voice on this Board, and I'm hoping that my colleagues on the Ad Hoc Board Composition Committee agree."

Hahn also recommended adding a board seat for someone who rides the train regularly, as well as allowing board members to designate alternate members who can vote in their absence.

The board currently has 13 members who vote on contracts worth billions of dollars for construction, trains, computers and all the other hardware needed for a transit system to send riders from the coast to the Inland Empire.

Members include all five county supervisors, Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass and three seats she appoints. The remaining four seats are shared by 87 cities divided into four geographic areas: North County and San Fernando Valley, San Gabriel Valley, Southeast County and Long Beach, and Southwest Corridor.

Long Beach shares the Southeast sector with 26 other cities, even

though it accounts for a quarter of the sector's weighted voting power — given its population of more than 462,000 — which gives it an incredible sway in who is elected to the seat.

The sector selects its leadership through an L.A. County City Selection Committee, which consists of 26 city representatives, who cast votes based on their population. Long Beach has 46 of the 164 total votes.

Breaking off Long Beach into its own seat would serve a dual purpose, Hahn said, of not only giving Long Beach better representation but also a better chance for the smaller cities to vie for the seat.

Several organizations expressed support for the new seat, including representatives from the Long Beach Chamber of Commerce, the city of Long Beach, the Downtown Long Beach Alliance, Congressman Robert Garcia and Long Beach Mayor Rex Richardson.

This comes as Richardson was appointed to the seat on Tuesday, filling a vacancy left behind by outgoing Whittier City Councilman Fernando Dutra. Richardson is expected to join the MTA board officially in July.

Talks to overhaul Metro's leadership run parallel to other governance changes seen across Los Angeles County, which began with the voter-approved Measure G in 2024 to create an elected County CEO in 2028 and grow to a nine-member Board of Supervisors in 2032.

Given their schedule, the Metro Board could take the matter to a vote as early as July, though Hahn's office says it may take time to iron out the details of the seat and how to handle its appointment process.

It reinvigorates a 2016 effort by then state Sen. Tony Mendoza, D-Artesia, who tried to shake up leadership by lowering the board to two supervisor seats while adding eight members to the 14-member board, including representatives from Long Beach and other cities across the Southland.

The bill was ultimately shelved by state legislators and even opposed by members of the County Board of Supervisors at the time. ■

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Creating a zero-emission truck route between the port and Central Valley

Long Beach and the Wonderful Company say they're working on it.

By John Donegan

The Port of Long Beach signed an agreement in May committing to a zero-emission trucking route from the Central Valley to the San Pedro Bay, an ambitious move meant to counter shoreline air pollution from the twin seaports and the highways used to ferry their goods.

The agreement was signed alongside The Wonderful Company's real estate arm, which agreed to include charging stations in its multimillion dollar logistics center near Bakersfield, and Lincoln Transportation Services, which recently ordered 300 newly built electric Tesla trucks. The first 50 to 70 semis should arrive in June.

Long Beach Port CEO Noel Hacegaba said there is strong momentum around this new model, which is capable of a 325- to 500-mile range and can charge to 60% within 30 minutes. Other companies, like Long Beach-based WattEV, have also put orders forward for the Tesla semis and have trucks expected to hit the road this year. About 200 of these models are already reserved through the seaports truck voucher program, he said.

But despite the massive investment, it still pales in comparison to the industry's reliance on fossil fuels. More than 18,000 trucks are registered to move cargo through the city seaport, overwhelmingly fueled by diesel. Only 654 trucks — 548 battery electric, 106 hydrogen fuel cell — are zero emission, according to port officials.

Diesel fumes contribute to well-documented health problems like childhood asthma in neighborhoods near the ports and warehouses. Studies have shown that those affected are disproportionately low-income and people of color.

A lot of hesitation to convert fleets rests on the lack of charging stations



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

The city of Long Beach serves as a background for the Port of Long Beach in Long Beach, Wednesday, Sept. 10, 2025.

along truck routes.

As of last year, California has more than 16,000 electric chargers dotted across its highways — about a tenth of the estimated 157,000 chargers that state energy officials say are needed to support its requirement that new heavy-duty vehicles sold must be all-electric by 2035.

As part of the agreement, the Port and either company will help create a plan to invest in clean energy infrastructure at either end of the major trade route, which needs far more charging stations and warehouses capable of accommodating electrified semis.

Each year, more than 300,000 TEUs, a standard measurement for shipping containers, move between the port complex and the southern Central Valley, a roughly 150-mile route with few charging stations.

Hacegaba said talks have not yet matured to the point of the Port

agreeing to pay for or subsidize new stations being built along the route. For now, the seaport is anxious to have 92 more charging stations online on its grounds within the next year. It currently has 102.

“What we're agreeing to do is pare our investments on either end of one of the nation's busiest trade routes,” Hacegaba said. “We have the highest number of truck charging stations of any port in the world.”

And the Wonderful Company, known for its citrus and specialty nuts grown in the Central Valley, will look to include charging stations and other new amenities as part of its expansion of its Wonderful Logistics Center in Shafter, a small farmland community 18 miles north of Bakersfield.

Under the plan, the center would nearly double in size — to 3,400 acres — using 1,800 acres of its own almond groves to build warehouse

space. The company also has plans for a \$120 million inland rail terminal located along the BNSF Railway main line — expected to be completed in early 2027 — and a new highway, called the Central Valley Green Pass, which will divert trucks from central Shafter onto major highways.

Each organization says they will spend time advocating to the industry and public on the benefits of the plan, with the hope of eventually encouraging other truck and warehouse companies to agree to make similar, greener arrangements.

This comes years after the city seaport joined a green-shipping corridor alongside Los Angeles, Shanghai and Singapore.

“But we know once that cargo, once that container, gets off that ship, it still has a little ways to go,” said Long Beach Mayor Rex Richardson. ■

Challenger *from page 14*

“I feel like I'm going up against a machine,” Flaherty said, of challenging a union-backed incumbent. “But, ultimately, I'm doing my calling and my purpose,” she added.

Flaherty had 33% of the vote.

The focus on Flaherty and Craighead largely eclipsed Pol-Lim's campaign. After surviving the Cambodian genocide, Pol-Lim arrived in California and served most of a decade as executive director of the United Cambodian Community. She had 12% of the vote.

Second school board incumbent also leads

On the other side of the city, incumbent Maria

Isabel López sailed to a significant lead over challenger Deborah Betance for the seat representing District 1, encompassing Bixby Knolls and North Long Beach. As of June 10, López had 77% of the vote compared to 33% for Betance.

López won the board seat in 2022, defeating two other candidates (including one backed by the teachers union). Since then, she has been one of the more outspoken trustees and a rare dissenting voice on a board that often votes as a unanimous block.

Both District 1 candidates were seeking office despite significant negative publicity.

In March, López's husband, a teacher at John

Muir Academy, was placed on administrative leave while the district investigates allegations that he abused a child at an LBUSD school several decades prior. López said she looks forward to a full investigation to clear his name.

Her challenger, Betance, is a former LBUSD teacher. While she still worked at Longfellow Elementary, she was arrested in connection with a hit-and-run that killed a 78-year-old woman in 2021. The district suspended her without pay, and Betance retired in early 2023. But prosecutors dropped the charges in spring 2023, saying there wasn't enough evidence to prosecute her.

See the latest vote tallies at results.lavote.gov. ■

A disused lot on PCH just became a hotspot for food trucks

It started with a food truck owner's plea for help on Craigslist and grew into something bigger.

By Ashley Bolter

The corner of Pacific Coast Highway and Orizaba Avenue was a car sales lot for years. Now it's a revolving court of food trucks called the PCH Food Park.

It's a dedicated space for the trucks, hosting four to six a day and creating a neighborhood gathering space along the heavily trafficked business corridor on the edge of Signal Hill.

"There was a need for something in the area to kind of help form community," Priscilla Jaramillo, one of the organizers of PCH Food Park, said.

The food park is the result of two dreams colliding with the help of a Craigslist ad.

Jaramillo put out an ad in January searching for a safe space to regularly set up her food truck and grow her business. Hossein "Fred" Farshidfar, who owns the lot where PCH Food Park now sits, was the only one to respond.

Farshidfar has dreamed of opening a food court with a huge Persian fountain in the middle since he was a student at Cal State Long Beach in the '80s. After years of leaving his dreams on the back burner while he pursued other interests, Farshidfar finally felt ready to start this project.

"I've waited too long for this," he said.

After the last lease on his property ended, Farshidfar kept the lot open for a year as he worked to bring his vision to life. He said he lost thousands of dollars to keep it vacant for so long.

"That shows my determination," Farshidfar said. "No matter what cost, I want to do this."

His daughters love food trucks, so he was already



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

The PCH Food Park brings several food trucks together in one spot in Long Beach, Friday, May 22, 2026.

interested in setting up a food truck park when he found Jaramillo's ad. Jaramillo was open to any ideas when she posted her ad, but she had seen food truck parks in other parts of the country and thought it would be great to have one here.

"As a food truck owner, I'm looking to bring a space that brings like consistency and visibility to other food truck businesses, as well as my own, and also provides a safe space for us to operate, and it kind of creates a unique outdoor dining concept, which is perfect for food trucks," she said.

Jaramillo's food truck, Fried Out LA, serves wagyu smashburgers and artisan fries. It will be a regular truck at the park. The vendors will rotate every week, and the schedule will be posted on Instagram. Any food truck with a Long Beach health

permit is welcome to apply for a spot.

In the future, they hope to lease out the building on the lot to an established coffee business looking to open another shop. They also want to expand the hours of the park and set up electric vehicle charging stations on the other half of the lot.

Though it doesn't have the Persian fountain he has always envisioned (yet), Farshidfar is excited to see his dreams finally becoming a reality. He is especially excited to build a positive community space and make his customers happy.

"If they are happy, I'm happy," Farshidfar said.

PCH Food Park, 3000 E. Pacific Coast Hwy., is open Fridays and Sundays from noon to 8 p.m. and Saturdays from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. They post their lineup of trucks on Instagram: @pchfoodpark. ■



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